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SUBJECT: INDIA SNUBS WORLD BANK TIGER CONSERVATION INITIATIVE

NEW DELHI 00002089 001.2 OF 002

11. (U) SUMMARY: The World Bank Tiger Conservation Initiative, announced in June 2008, was met with great controversy in India with major newspapers such as the Times of India and the Indian Express running multiple stories on how the Government of India snubbed the World Bank's offer for a loan as well as how the initiative sparked outrage amongst Indian conservationists. EmbOffs discussed the initiative with GOI, NGO, and World Bank officials and learned that not only does India have no interest in World Bank assistance for in situ tiger management, but also that four major tiger conservation NGOs have pulled out of the International Tiger Coalition in protest. India's rancor towards the World Bank on the issue appears to be driven by animosity over past Bank conservation projects, pride in India's ability to conserve its own tigers, and lack of consultation prior to the initiative's announcement. END SUMMARY.

THE WORLD BANK INITIATIVE

12. (U) On June 9, 2008, the World Bank held a gala event to announce it's new Tiger Conservation Initiative designed to help conserve the world's remaining wild tiger population. The initiative encompasses an action plan designed to create a more sustainable and effective model of tiger conservation by addressing four broad areas including: creating and implementing a conservation paradigm that enlists incentives; providing adequate financial resources; creating biodiversity-friendly infrastructure; and tackling illegal trade to control poaching. A major premise of the initiative, as stated on the World Bank website, is "actions by any country in isolation will not be adequate to save tigers and a genuine commitment and partnership is needed to achieve this goal."

13. (U) A crucial partner in the World Bank's initiative is the International Tiger Coalition (ITC) which, prior to the announcement of the initiative, was an alliance of 35 organizations which came together to combat the illegal trade in tiger parts and products. EmbOffs have confirmed that four Indian members of the ITC, the NGOs Aaranyak, Ranthambore Foundation, Corbett Foundation, and the Wildlife Protection Society of India (WPSI), who are among the most important players in Indian tiger conservation, have all pulled out of the ITC in protest against the World Bank initiative.

THE REASONS BEHIND THE SNUB

14. (SBU) EmbOffs met with Belinda Wright, the world-renowned tiger conservationist and Executive Director of WPSI, who explained that the World Bank had a poor history of tiger conservation in India,

didn't understand the Indian situation, and didn't properly engage with India prior to the announcement of the initiative. She noted the Indian conservation community still had a great deal of animosity towards the World Bank for its 1996 to 2004 Ecodevelopment Project which, among other issues, became mired in controversy for its alleged misuse of funds and destruction of forest cover in Nagerhole National Park. She said the World Bank believes every problem can be solved by throwing money at it and didn't realize infusions of capital into rural areas of India often caused more problems than it solved due to lack of understanding of the impact large sums have on rural communities, lack of controls, and corruption. She also stated the World Bank tried to induce Indian participation in the tiger conservation initiative by going directly to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's office with an offer for a loan without consulting the Bank's putative partners, the Indian NGOs. She said the lack of consultation was especially bothersome because what became the current initiative had originally started out as an Indian request to the Bank to prepare a study on the cross-border illegal wildlife trade. When asked what she thought the future held for the initiative in India, she said the World Bank knows it cannot succeed without India and that she expected the Bank to put a great deal of pressure on the GOI to collaborate in some fashion in order to save face. She concluded by noting the pensions of several officials in the Prime Minister's Office were funded by the World Bank and that she wouldn't be surprised if the GOI in the end agreed to cooperate in some fashion.

15. (SBU) In a meeting with Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) officials Dr. R.B. Lal, Inspector General of Forest, Wildlife, and Mr. M.B. Lal, Additional Director General, Wildlife, EmbOffs were told the World Bank had bypassed the MoEF taking its initiative directly to the Prime Minister's Office in the form of an offer for a loan. When asked what they thought of the initiative, Dr. R.B. Lal responded by questioning what the World Bank had to offer stating that India had far greater expertise in tiger

NEW DELHI 00002089 002.2 OF 002

conservation than the Bank and that India didn't need the Bank's money considering it had recently allocated \$153 million for tiger conservation. Mr. M.B. Lal took a slightly softer line stating the GOI would be happy to cooperate internationally on enforcement and capacity building but did not need assistance with in situ tiger management claiming the World Bank should stick to infrastructure.

16. (SBU) EmbOffs also met with WWF-India Secretary General Ravi Singh, who noted he was the only Indian NGO attendee at the World Bank's announcement of the initiative held at the National Zoo in Washington, D.C. He said he "got hell" from the other Indian NGOs for attending the event but credited the Bank for shining a spotlight on tiger conservation and particularly praised the Bank's enlistment of Hollywood celebrities Harrison Ford, Bo Derek, and Robert Duval, who helped garner much of the media attention. He confirmed a great deal of what Ms. Wright had said regarding Indian animosity towards the Bank for its past conservation efforts but noted a lot of the ire was inspired by the Bank's failure to consult with the Indian NGOs. He stated he had been present at a meeting of the NGOs in Kanha National Park where the initiative had been discussed and one of the concerns was perceived arrogance on the part of the Bank. He stated it was at this meeting that several Indian ITC members had decided to withdraw from the coalition. When asked about the future of the initiative in India, Singh stated the Bank needed to clearly communicate how it could assist India and that offers for a loan or expertise would not suffice.

17. (SBU) In a meeting with Charles Cormier, Team Leader, Environment and Water Resources, the Delhi-based World Bank official with direct responsibility for conservation issues, EmbOffs were told the Bank had not made a proposal to the GOI regarding tiger conservation and that media reports the Bank had offered India a loan were false. Mr. Cormier stated he had spent a great deal of time trying to set the record straight and candidly informed EmbOffs the Bank understands India is not interested in its assistance for tiger conservation. He did note the Delhi office of the Bank was not the prime driver of the initiative and that any future movement in India would be coming from the Bank's headquarters in Washington.

18. (U) COMMENT: Considering India is home to the world's largest population of wild tigers, the World Bank needs India's participation in the Tiger Conservation Initiative for it to have any long-term impact. Although India's tigers are under great threat, Indian NGOs, the GOI, and the state governments take great pride in their conservation efforts which, since 2005, is reasonably justified. India no longer needs outside money to conserve tigers, another source of pride, and considers offers of expertise on in situ tiger management, especially from countries that do not have wild tiger populations, insulting. That said, the distinction between managing tigers within reserves and overall tiger conservation, especially combating the illegal wildlife trade which the GOI has recognized as a legitimate area for international cooperation, is an important one that should be properly addressed.
END COMMENT.

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